



Soldiers confront Global War on Terrorism in unconventional way

Story and photo by Spc. Eric M. McKeely

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti—Army Sgt. Travis M. Smith has a first-hand understanding of the Global War on Terrorism.

Smith, a 25-year-old infantry soldier with the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), Bravo Co., recently returned to Camp Lemonier from providing security for a Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa civil affairs project in rural Djibouti. The project, at which engineers from the 463rd Engineering Battalion of Wheeling, W. V., are constructing a road for Djiboutians, has allowed Smith to experience a less conventional way of fighting a war.

The construction of the road, across difficult and rocky terrain, is needed by locals for vehicle and pedestrian transportation.

Smith said projects such as the road site help provide necessities to locals and place their government in a better position to fend off terrorists.

"We're doing this to build relations with Djiboutians. Not only do we better equip them to fight for themselves but we help provide an overall quality of life for them as well," said Smith, who recently returned from several days at the site and will soon exit again for the site.

While protecting the site and engineers from security threats, Smith said

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company soldiers serve as a sort of ambassadors.

"As you move closer to the site, people who can see and know what we're doing are much more welcoming. They want us in their country," he said.

Bravo Co. has almost completed one of several months of a deployment here, the first for a unit of the Old Guard since the Vietnam War, and it has embarked on protecting civil affairs missions including sites at a well, a school, and at the road site.

These aren't the only type of missions with which the company has been involved, said Bravo Company Commander Capt. Michael J. Trotter.

Many of the company's other missions, however, are also purposed to

enable nations to fight terrorists themselves.

Trotter said the company's mission includes traveling to a neighboring country to train and providing security for civil affairs missions. Each of these pieces, he said, is a significant contribution to combating terrorism.

"What we're doing here is important, hands down," said Trotter. "If there's one thing I've learned or I continue to learn every day we are here, it is that this is the Global War on Terrorism. What we're doing here is going to prevent your kids and your kids' kids from having another 9/11."

Soldiers providing security at the civil affairs missions are tactically ready for threats that may arise, Trotter said. This allows the civil affairs personnel to complete their tasks without security fears, he added.

Bravo Co. soldier Spc. Jeremy M. Locke, 20, said he was unnerved when he first traveled through Djibouti, noticing differences in the Djiboutian and American qualities of life, but that he is glad his tasks so far in the GWOT are enabling improvements in local life.

"It's nice to be involved in an effort in country and to do something good for what I consider less fortunate people," Locke said.

Tadjoura from page 2

parts of the buildings not in the contract and spent several extra days and dollars to complete these additional donations.

"This was a great cooperative effort," said Army Maj. Ralph M. Engeler, commanding officer for C Company, 478th Civil Affairs Battalion. "Not only for the U.S., but the community as well."

The hospital renovations also mark a beginning to completed civil military operations in the northern region of Djibouti, said Engeler. One of the main missions of the civil affairs battalion is to make sure help is given to all of the country evenly, not just one region.

"We've had a lot of missions completed in the southern part of the country, but this is really only the second one in the north," added Engeler.

The renovations made to the hospital included the maternity ward, pediatrics building, pharmacy, bathrooms and an administration building. The repairs included replacing doors, windows, fans, and repairing plumbing and exterior lighting.

"Another big repair that was made was the fence that surrounded the hospital," said McCoy.

This dedication also marks a huge victory in helping to complete CJTF-HOA's mission to detect, disrupt and defeat transnational terrorism in the region. The project was successful in building many long-term relations with the U.S. military and the district of Tadjoura.

"Before this people here thought of the United States as just a powerful military force, now the community has built many very close relationship with the Americans that helped out on these projects," said Adour.

For the civil affairs company, completing this project also signifies a near end to their eight-month tour in support of CJTF-HOA.

In his speech during the ceremony, Army Col. Charles E. Sumpter, director of logistics for CJTF-HOA ended by saying, "By doing this project and others like it, the United States, a compassionate nation, has established a spirit of cooperation and partnership with the district of Tadjoura and Djibouti that will last for years."

Correction: In the Jan 5, 2004 Horn Courier Year in Review, Capt. Seth R. Michaud name was misspelled on page 9. Capt. Michaud was killed June 22, 2003 in a training accident.